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WOMEN UNDER APARTHEID AND REFUGEE AND DISPLACED WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT AFRICAN STATES

1. As the United Nations Decade for Women draws to a close special attention will be drawn to the review and appraisal of the situation of women living under very special circumstances. In the Africa region such women are the several millions caught under the oppression of apartheid or involuntarily displaced and thrown into refugee existence in independent states. Numerous conventions, resolutions and declarations of the United Nations General Assembly, international conferences and meetings have in recent years focussed attention on the crime of apartheid and the suffering of African refugees and displaced persons. The International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA I, Geneva, 1980) the forthcoming ICARA II (Geneva, July 1984), the International Conference on Racism and Racial Discrimination (Geneva, 1983), the International Conference in Support of the Struggle of the Namibian People for Independence (Paris, 1983), and the Meeting of the OAU Secretariat and Voluntary Agencies on African Refugees (Arusha, 1983) are among the most recent international efforts to find solutions to these problems.

2. The ECA Conference of Ministers has persistently drawn attention to the plight of Africans in the two situations. The Conference resolutions 370(XIV) of 27 March 1979 and 411(XVI) of 10 April 1981 condemned the racist and apartheid policy of the South African regime, called for direct assistance to the liberation movements recognized by the OAU and appealed for support to the front-line African States suffering from the consequences of apartheid aggression. In the Addis Ababa Declaration adopted at their Silver Jubilee Anniversary session, member States of the Commission again denounced the obnoxious policy of apartheid and renewed their resolve to pursue the total liberation of the continent.

3. Likewise, Conference resolution 395(XV) of 12 April 1980 drew attention to the situation of refugees in Africa, in particular their rapidly growing numbers, and urged member States, the Secretariat and the UNHCR to provide assistance in the fields of education, training, employment and other long-term socio-economic development programmes. It has been reasonably established that in 1967 there were about 750,000 African refugees. In 1978 the number had reached 3.5 million and by 1980 had exceeded 5 million, or more than half the world's total of refugees. One out of every two refugees in the world is an African. This figure does not include the thousands of persons subjected to forced internal migrations caused by famines, violence and civil war.

4. African women's organizations and groups have shown increased concern for the plight of women caught in the two dire circumstances. In 1979 the Second Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development (Lusaka) discussed the issue of apartheid and the status of women in Southern Africa in terms of the effects of the racist policy and called for measures to assist the affected peoples. The call made in Lusaka was reiterated in Douala in 1982 when the Third Meeting of the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee on the Integration of Women in Development (ARCC) discussed the question of refugee and displaced women and peace and development in Africa and the world. The ECA Conference of Ministers adopted resolution 447(XVII) of 30 April 1982 requesting, inter alia, the inclusion of these serious issues on the agenda of the Third Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development to be held in 1984.

5. There is need for serious study of the many facets of these issues. While the broad outlines of the situation of all peoples affected by apartheid and the refugee crisis in Africa are known through various studies sponsored by the Special Committee on Apartheid, the National Liberation Movements, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other United Nations agencies and voluntary organizations, there is general agreement that the particular situation of women in these circumstances is not sufficiently well delineated. For example, there is no systematic data collection on the numbers, categories and characteristics of the women affected, the differential impact of their location, their degrees of "vulnerability", their special assets and potentialities.

6. The ARCC meeting in Douala in 1982 acknowledgedthat African women and governments were not sufficiently sensitized to the magnitude of the problems due to lack of information and statistics on the women and children affected. The international community was also made aware of this problem at the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women held at Copenhagen in 1980. Thus resolution 13 of the Conference urged UNHCR to draw upon the expertise of all concerned UN bodies to carry out detailed studies and research and resolution 45 called upon the women of the world to pressurize their governments to disseminate information on the effects of apartheid as widely as possible.

7. The need for detailed research and adequate data is not only imperative to sensitize African governments and the international community in the mobilization of support and assistance, it is also essential for the understanding of the affected women and children themselves as they undergo various changes in their enforced circumstances. Women under apartheid need to know and understand fully the political, economic, social and ideological implications of their triple oppression by race, class and sex under the complex racist policy. They and their leaders in the struggle against apartheid also need to know how to effect the necessary changes in the position and roles of women when their countries are liberated and reconstructed. In the case of refugee and displaced women, cultural conditioning, the hazards of abrupt and unplanned movements away from home, the burden of increased and unaccustomed family responsibilities in unfamiliar environments, all help to make them vulnerable. The women need to understand these forces in order to overcome the barriers to their own constructive development. Likewise, refugee-serving agencies and governments need to appreciate the specific issues of women to better provide relevant humanitarian and technical assistance. Such understanding and appreciation can be achieved through detailed and more focussed studies.

8. The problems of women under apartheid and displaced and refugee women overlap and are common in some respects, yet they differ significantly in their root causes and effects when seen in the totality of the respective social contexts. A theoretical framework has therefore been developed in a joint orientation and methodology workshop for the study that will reveal the underlying causes and explain the effects of the various processes of transformation in the social, economic, political, legal, cultural and ideological spheres. The study is being conducted in two complementary undertakings by two consultants from the region to produce the best results. One consultant is studying women under apartheid in South Africa and Namibia and in three frontline states: Zambia, Tanzania and Angola. The other consultant is studying refugee and displaced women in four independent African States: Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. This cluster of countries in the Horn and Eastern Africa (together with Tanzania and Kenya) hosts the majority of Africa's 5 million refugees. They also have large
numbers of displaced persons. As these are also some of the poorest, least developed countries (LDCs) of the region, their condition compounds the problems of the people seeking refuge and asylum and so present the crisis in sharpest relief.

9. The consultants will review the available documentation on the subjects and conduct field research and seek statistical data which will enable them to analyse the root causes and assess the quantitative and qualitative effects of apartheid and the refugee situation on women with particular reference to juridical, political, economic, social, psychological and cultural effects. They will evaluate the major changes that have occurred, identify the existing problems and needs of different categories of women (young/old, educated/uneducated, married/unmarried, mothers, widows, heads of households), and make recommendations for measures to be taken at the levels of national liberation movements, African women's organizations, African governments and the international community. If appropriate, they will propose a regional plan of action on the critical issues.

10. The comparative research of different categories of apartheid-affected and refugee women will provide a better basis for determining realistic policy options than most of the existing data that treats the women as an undifferentiated mass. The findings will be presented to the Third Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development. The results will also be capable of being critically evaluated and used by those studied for understanding their own reality and directing their actions, as well as by national machineries for women, voluntary organizations, concerned governments and international agencies for formulating and implementing necessary measures.